

In one instance the researcher went to the home of an elderly Black man who lived alone. He invited her into his small, but tidy, living room. The living room contained two chairs and a sofa that had a coffee table in front of it. The man welcomed the researcher to “have a seat,” indicating a chair, and he sat on the couch.

As they began to talk about where the family lived, the researcher pulled out and unfolded a large map that she wanted the man to look at with her. Eyeing the coffee table on which she could spread out the map, the researcher stood, map in hand, and asked, “May I sit on the sofa beside you so you can look at this with me?” A very apparent look of surprise came over the man’s face. It was as if the researcher had startled him. He quickly recovered and moved over, motioning for the researcher to join him on the sofa. However, he was aware that he had reacted and the researcher had observed, so he felt compelled to explain. He said there was a time when a White woman never would have sat down by a Black man, and he added other comments, such as the fact when he was growing up “on the arsenal,” he would not have spoken to a White woman unless she spoke to him first. At that time, the researcher became aware of a question she had not thought to ask. A question about social interaction between Black people and White people was added to her list. This was a factor to be considered in life in the community.

The Subjects. Twenty-nine people were interviewed; of those, twenty-six provided useful information. The youngest did not give her age, but based on her comments, she was judged to be about 75 years old. Most of the subjects were in their eighties. The oldest person who was interviewed (now deceased) was born in 1900, which means she would have been 106 years old this year. The majority of the subjects were Black people, which is representative of the communities in which they lived.

The Length of the Interviews. The shortest interview lasted about an hour. This was the oldest person interviewed and she was in frail health. Generally, the interviews lasted about two hours. Some lasted longer. In a few instances the subjects’ were visited twice, and in others they were visited three times or more.

Those who were visited the most were ones who told her to “come back anytime.” When the researcher went back to their homes, she was treated as a welcomed visitor. In conversations that ensued, she mentioned findings that puzzled her and asked if they could provide insight. They provided additional information that allowed pieces to fall into place.

Sometimes subjects were contacted again by telephone and asked for information that would clarify something they had said in the interview. Sometimes additional questions were asked. However, this was kept to a minimum because of time constraints.

In three instances, elderly men who had lived in Pond Beat and had extensive knowledge came to the arsenal and were able to point out places and talk about what had been there. Some of the women who were interviewed expressed a desire to come back to where they had once lived and look around. The first group of three had a general knowledge about where they had lived. Three of the others could not come close to pinpointing the area